



WINDS FROM JAPAN

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Tips on Surviving in Japan

By Yoichiro IWASAKI

The first thing to remember about Japan, is that it is a agglomerate of busy cosmopolitan cities. True, we still maintain a few cities, like Kyoto and Nara, that display the charms of traditional Japan, but the great majority of its people and cities live in the modern world. At a glance, Japan looks like its counterparts, New York, London or Paris.

But a closer examination will reveal that the surface resemblances cover a more subtle divergence with the Western world, which Japanese embrace with such ardor.

1) No tipping: In Japan, one can say the tipping system has been eliminated altogether. Or more correctly, it never took root. So when you take a taxi or eat at a restaurant, do not even think about how much to tip. In major hotels and high class restaurants, a service charge of 10-5% is automatically charged. But other than that, only the mandatory Consumption Tax (a sales or excise tax, levied on all commercial transactions) of 5%, is added to or included in your bill.

2) In a nutshell, Japan occupies an area of 143,000 square miles, or 366,000 square meters, making it the size of the state of Montana, USA. Into this area, half the population of the USA is squeezed in, and to make things worse, only 20% of the land is on flat plains.

This makes for very crowded living, which is why Japanese houses are smaller than in other countries, and tend to be built in close proximity to each other. To a foreigner, it seems that Japan is made of one continuous residential area, from Tokyo to Osaka and beyond.

3) Getting about in Japan is easy, because so many top notch means of public transportation are readily and cheaply available.

All stations have signs in English, and in most cases are color-coded by lines. Traffic is driven on the left hand side of the way, and legacy from the samurai days, because they wore their swords on their left hip and did not wish to accidentally bump their swords to another samurai's sword, a mortal affront atoneable only by fighting a duel.

(1) **Surface trains and subways** (Undergrounds) lines are abundant and go to almost anywhere one desires to go. The trans run frequently and are safe and clean.

One feature that may be different from your local trains is that a person buys a ticket at the station from a machine, then goes through a wicket gate by depositing the ticket into a machine, which after punching it, returns it to you. You must keep the ticket, because at your destination, you must once again put the ticket into the wicket machine to get out.. The ticket will not be returned to you. Train tickets are reasonable, but during rush hours, you may be swamped by people going or returning from work. So, beware!

(2) **Taxis:** Doors at the curb-side are automated, and opened by a lever by the driver. No tipping is required.

4) The temperature in April is quite pleasant, causing many flowers to bloom. The average high temperature in Osaka for April is 19.5 degrees and the low is 10.2 degrees. Average rainfall in Osaka for the month is 133.8 millimeters.

The rest of Mainland Japan tend to be quite similar to Osaka in its climate.

5) **Drinking water:** Water in Japan is soft water, so generally one is able to drink tap water without any problems. It may have a faint chlorine taste, because chlorine is still used in many cities to sterilize water.

(Some cities use fluorine). Bottled water and tea are sold everywhere, even by vending machines.

6) Shop hours: Most stores open at 10 AM (some stores, including department stores open at 11 AM). They tend to close at 6 or 7 PM. To meet demand for off-hours shopping for incidentals, there are the convenient stores, which are open from 7 AM to 11 PM, or at some 24 hours.

7) What the Japanese eat at home: To get a glimpse of what ordinary Japanese eat at home, take a stroll through the basement floor of department stores. Here are on display (and sold), the raw ingredients and also ready-made palates of what we normally consume at home.

If you wish to sample, some shops have little dishes for tasting. Also, one can buy *Bentos* (box lunches) to take out.

8) Credit cards: Japan is a credit card nation, but with certain limits. A lot of the small shops and restaurants do not accept credit cards, because they do not wish to pay the commission to card companies. Even those who do, require a minimum payment (above 2,000 yen or so, depending on the case), for the use of a credit card. So it is better to carry some amount of cash in Yen to get around.

9) English capabilities: Japanese start to learn English from their first year in Middle School (junior High School), or at the age of 13 or so. However, the number of Japanese, who are able to understand spoken English and to speak it are very few indeed. Most of the English taught at school is reading text and translating into Japanese. This is due to the fact that reading Western publications was the window to the modern world. Now visual images prevail, so

verbal communication with foreigners is at a minimum.

So my suggestions to a foreigner who wishes to talk to a Japanese on the street, for instance, asking directions or other sundry items are as follows:

- (1) Get hold of a young person in his 20s or a student in school uniform, who may be more exposed to Western ways.
- (2) Write down your questions on a piece of paper, rather than trying to communicate orally. Japanese can read English and understand the written text much better than receiving a message by ear.
- (3) If no paper is handy, use Words, rather than Sentences. When used with some simple Japanese words, it can be quite effective.

Example: *Doko?* (Where is?) -- "*Kita Doko?*" (where is Kita-North)

Example: *Nani?* (What is?) -- pointing at an object, say "*Nani?*"

Example: *Douzo!* (Please!. After you. Go ahead!) It is used like the Italian word "*Prego!*", and is very convenient to know.

Example "*Doumo*" (Not at all. You are welcome. Excuse me) This is kind of a catch-all word. When another person says "thank you" (*ari-ga-tou*), you can use this in return.

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Welcome to the "City of *Kuida-ore*"

By Shoichi OKUYAMA

Osaka is well known as "City of *Kuida-ore*." You can definitely enjoy a wide spectrum of food, starting at the low end with the down-to earth but tasteful *Okonomiyaki* and *Takoyaki*, sold in small shops and stalls along its boulevards. But it cumulates in the most elaborate Japanese haute cuisine *Kaiseki*, presented at the most exquisite Japanese Inns. Being a port open to the world, Osaka boasts a great variety of Western and Oriental cuisines.

Blessed with an abundance of delicious products from the sea and the mountains since ancient times, Osaka has been well known as a gourmet town. Sushi, blowfish (*fugu*), eel and *udon* (wheat noodles) are just

a few examples of the varied and pleasing flavors one can enjoy in original and distinct Osaka cooking styles, which are quite different from those found in Tokyo or the eastern part of Japan.

Osaka Sushi

Many special foods not available in Tokyo can be found in Osaka. Among them are pressed sushi, *battera*, steamed sushi, and other types of Osaka-style sushi. They are more traditional than the sushi you probably associate with the word Sushi. Traditional sushi was developed for preserving fish by fermentation or marinated with vinegar. Modern sushi of sushi bar fame, using raw fish, which we find in Tokyo and everywhere else in Japan and

worldwide, is relatively new, because it gained popularity only with the development of modern refrigeration technology. Also, *Kanto-daki* (vegetables, meat dumplings, and all kinds of Tofu derivatives cooked in a broth) and *negima kushi-yaki* (leek and tuna grilled on a stick) are both taste that originated in Osaka.

Okonomiyaki, local food

Local *Okonomiyaki*, which is a Japanese style pancake, made using a batter of flour, water and egg with shredded cabbage, meat or squid, grilled on a hot plate and topped with special sauce and mayonnaise, is popular. It is by no means elegant cooking, but fun and dynamic. Most restaurants let you cook it yourself over an iron hot plate set in your table. *Takoyaki* may be viewed as a small-sized ball-shaped variant of *Okonomiyaki* with a single piece of octopus meat inside.

Dos and Don'ts at a Japanese table

- Try to go native by saying "*Itadakimasu*" before eating like *Buono Appetit*, and "*Gochiso Sama*" when you finish. Your Japanese host will love it.
- Do not mind if you handle your chopsticks poorly, as you are not supposed to be a master of manipulating two little pieces of wood.
- Don't pour soy sauce over rice. Soy sauce has too much salt and that is not good for your health. And more importantly it just does not look nice to Japanese eyes. Rice normally is cooked by itself, and does not have much of a taste. You are expected to eat some *Okazu* (meat, fish, vegetable

etc) and rice alternately, which will dilute the stronger taste of the *Okazu*.

- It is allowed or even encouraged to hold up a bowl, for rice, soup or others, in your hands and place it near your mouth to eat. It is a perfectly normal thing to do and will be easier to eat and drink when one has only chopsticks. No kidding here.
- Don't ask too many questions about the identity of the food on the table, because your host simply may not know in English what he or she has been eating for more than half a century, or there are so many varieties of fish and vegetable not available outside Japan, and translation is not possible. Also, some of the dishes are made of soybeans, for example, but are designed to look as meat or fish, as some Buddhist sect did not allow any living creature to be served. We can assure you everything on the plate in front of you is edible.
- Try *fugu* or blowfish. It's a delicacy that does not have very much taste in itself, but you can tell your friend when you get home how nice it was and how courageous you were. *Fugu* is safe, most of the time. Only a few people fall with the poison *fugu* has each year in entire Japan, when they try to cook *fugu* themselves and make mistakes. If you are eating at a restaurant, you are safe, well, most of the time.

Eat and drink well and have fun! These are definitely one of "things to do" in Osaka.

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Where to go? Here are some suggestions.

By Yuzuru HAYASHI

Here are some examples of sightseeing spots which you might be interested in visiting during your stay in *Kansai* area. Even for busy conference participants, they are really worth considering for the time of rest and relaxation.

[Osaka]

Osaka-jo Kastle

Osaka-jo, the Osaka Castle, is the symbol of Osaka city. It was founded by *Toyotomi Hideyoshi* in 1583 on the ruins of *Ishiyama Hongan-ji*, a Buddhist temple which was the headquarters of the *Ikko* sect, a

group of bellicose, armed priests. Although much of its structure is the result of recent reconstruction, some of the original structures remain, including the massive stones that form its stone walls. In some places, these stones bear various marks carved on it, which show the place of origin of the stone, or the family crests of feudal lords who were responsible in procuring the stones for reconstruction of the stone wall during the Tokugawa government.

Shitenno-ji Temple

One of the oldest Japanese temples, founded by *Shotoku Taishi* a crown prince and a regent in 593, is dedicated to the four deities guarding the four cardinal points. Like the Osaka Caste, this temple is

also a reconstruction in concrete, but preserves its original layout called the Kudara style, one of the earliest formal temple plans in Japan. It is characterized by the main buildings aligned on a north-south axis, and the whole layout enclosed within a cloister.

Imamiya Ebisu Jinja Shrine

Better known to people in Osaka as "Ebessan of Imamiya", this shrine is believed to have been built as the west guardian shrine of *Shitenno-ji*. Originally, *Ebisu*, the god of fishing was worshipped, but gradually *Ebisu* became more associated with business and commerce, and nowadays is a place of worship for merchants. Its annual festival in January is a highlight of the New Year season in Osaka, characterized by the shout of shrine maidens (*fukumusume*), "Bring you bamboo branches here!" while they hang lucky charms to bamboo branches brought by worshippers, believed to bring luck and prosperity.

Sumiyoshi-Taisha Shrine

Around 2000 *Sumiyoshi* chapter shrines are said to be located in all parts of Japan, but this is the most prominent one. Other than being a place for worship by *waka* poets and martial arts students, this is a place of worship for sailors and fishermen, who believe the shrine deities protect them from danger at sea. The numerous stone lanterns (well over 600) found in the shrines place are offerings from such worshippers. It also features the *Taikobashi*, an arched bridge, said to be a donation by *Toyotomi Hideyoshi*.

[Kyoto]

To-ji Temple

Originally built as a guardian temple of Kyoto, *To-ji* became a theological university under *Kukai* (a.k.a. *Kobo Daishi*), founder of the *Shingon* sect. Since this sect is a distant cousin of Tibetan Buddhism, it has incorporated some characteristics of the rituals of it. Among them is the mandala, a complex diagram used to depict the universe as interpreted in Buddhism. In the *Kodo* (the Lecture Hall) a three-dimensional expression of the mandala can be seen. *Kukai* used sculptures of deities placed purposely to represent the mandala in the most impressive way. Other than this building, there are also attractive buildings, like the *Kondo* (Golden Hall) and the five-tiered pagoda (*Goju-no-to*), which is an evolved style of the Indian Stupa, where relics of Buddha were entombed. In this sense, the pagoda is a common building to many temples in Japan. The pagoda of *To-ji*, however, is the tallest one, 57 meters high.

Sanjusangen-do Temple

This temple was built by *Taira-no-Kiyomori*, a great general. In the period when this temple was built, it was believed that the world was entering the *Mappo* period, where teachings of Buddha would vanish, and salvation would only be available through the mercy of *Amida Buddha*. The impressive scene of the 1001 statues of *Senju-Kannon* (*Kannon-Bosatsu*, the agent of *Amida Buddha*, having 1000 hands to express its infinite compassion) can be seen in the Main Hall, which is 118 meters "wide" and 18 meters deep. *Sanjusangen-do* means 33 *ken* (or *gen*) Hall, where *ken* was the then standard width.

Kiyomizu-dera Temple

Kiyomizu-dera, meaning "the temple of pure water" received its name from a sacred fall nearby. Built on a slope of a mountain, it has the original structure of being supported by wooden pillars, overlooking Kyoto below. Due to this characteristic, there is an old saying in Japan, "Jump from the terrace of *Kiyomizu*," when one is determined to throw himself into an all-or-nothing struggle.

[Nara]

Todai-ji Temple

Famous as the temple of the Great Buddha, it was originally built in 752 A.D. when Nara was the capital with the imperial court situated there. Among the numerous religious monuments, the *Daibutsu-den* (Great Buddha Hall) housing the *Daibutsu* (Great Buddha) is the largest wooden structure in the world (47.5 meters high, 57 meters wide, and 50 meters deep). Though artistically a mixture of restorations, the Great Buddha indeed impresses people with its size. One must not forget the *Shoso-in* (Imperial Repository) which has kept fabulous collection of artifacts and religious items in an astounding state of preservation for about 1200 years, despite its deceptive look of a "log house".

Horyu-ji Temple

First founded as a seminary for *Shotoku Taishi's* followers, *Horyu-ji* contains the oldest wooden structures in the world, as well as preserving early Buddhist art. Among these, the bronze images of *Yakushi* and Shaka Trinity have various characteristics that are similar to some Chinese stone statuary, including the "archaic smile". The *Kudara Kannon*, a wooden sculpture unique in Japanese art but of obscure origin, the statue of *Miroku Bosatsu*, claimed to be of Japanese origin but remarkably similar to a statue in Kyoto acknowledged to be Korean, all these piece of early Buddhist art show heavy influence of the continental Asia.

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